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ABSTRACT

The Partnership in Education Project works to raise the educational level of children living in a number of priority areas in Scotland. In order to achieve this aim, the project seeks to develop parents' skills as child educators, and foster partnerships between educational professionals and parents. The project's work is based on six principles: (1) valuing others; (2) using experience-based learning; (3) working in small groups; (4) providing opportunities for interactive communication; (5) using a cycle of learning that involves planning, acting, and reflecting; and (6) encouraging interagency cooperation. The Partnership in Education project has learned from the experiences of other programs. These experiences include the successes of the Head Start Program in the United States; the Perry preschool study on the long-term effects of preschool education, which was conducted by the High/Scope Foundation in the United States; and the Oxford Preschool research project, in the United Kingdom, which examined preschool contexts that stimulate children's complex play activity. The Partnership in Education project has also adopted into its work some key ideas from educational theorists and researchers, including those of Paulo Freire, Margaret Donaldson, and Barbara Tizard. The project has developed programs for joint working between parents and professionals. (BC)

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Linking theory to practice: the experience of the Partnership in Education project, Strathclyde, Scotland

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Editorial history

This paper was written, initially, as a guideline for new members of staff joining the Partnership in Education project in Strathclyde, Scotland. It describes the research which had been influential in the early stages of the project's development, and the key ideas which have since formed the basis of the project's philosophy and approach. The paper is in two sections: Learning from others' experience and Key ideas from theory and research.

The paper has not been published before.

About the author

Fiona Orton, who works as a tutor within the Partnership in Education project in Strathclyde, Scotland, gained her B.Ed. degree from Sheffield University in 1972. Since then, she has held posts with Nottinghamshire County Council as a teacher, and with Birmingham County Council in the field of home-school liaison.

She joined the Partnership in Education Project in 1984, shortly after it had been launched.

About the project

The Partnership in Education project, sited in the largest local authority in Europe, works in a number of priority areas designated by Strathclyde Regional Council, with the long-term aim of raising the educational level of the children living there. In order to achieve this goal, the project has sought not only to affirm parents as their own children's prime educators but to develop parents' potential and skills in this role. A second strand of the project's work is to develop working relationships and practices among staff in relevant local services, thereby hoping to foster a genuine partnership between professionals and parents.

A final aim of the project is to develop a model, or models, for services to young children and their families, which can be disseminated so that the strategies can be used to reach many other communities. The project is jointly funded by the Strathclyde Regional Council and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and its approach has been closely tailored to the region's own 'Social Strategy for the Eighties', focusing on the rights of people to develop their full potential and to exercise choice and autonomy in their local communities.

Further information is available from the project: Partnership Project Centre, 179 Muirshiel Crescent, Priesthill, Glasgow G53, United Kingdom.

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE

In addition to its own experience, the Partnership in Education project has been influenced by some key pieces of research and by some theoretical approaches to cognitive and social development. This paper presents a brief overview of this work and indicates how it has helped shape the project's approach, strategy and concept of 'working in partnership'. The six project principles on which the work is based can been seen as 'underlying themes' and are reflected in the practical day to day programmes and ongoing work. These principles were formulated over several years and were born out of the practical work of the project which was itself influenced by the theory and research outlined here. These key ideas and research studies were central to the first project leader, Doreen Grant.[1] Prior to the Partnership in Education project she had spent many years working with children, their families, communities and teachers to find ways of helping children achieve their full potential. These six principles were formed through the practice of the project team, the influence of previous research and through working closely with the project's evaluation team, based at Strathclyde University, who helped the team develop its philosophy.

1 Grant, D. (1989). *Learning Relations.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

2 Kay, I. and Struthers, S. (1988). *Partnership in Education – A Public Report.* Glasgow: Strathclyde Regional Council.

THE PROJECT PRINCIPLES[2]

1 Valuing others
- recognises that everyone has a contribution to make
- values that contribution
- recognises and values the role of the parent as principal educator
- starts from where everyone is 'at'
- builds upon what already exists in a neighbourhood/school/centre

2 Experience-based learning
- involves organising groups around a task
- brings everyone to the same starting point
- gives the group a focus
- helps everyone to relate
- recognises that active learning is the most meaningful, and therefore effective, type of learning

3 Working in small groups
- encourages people to participate more
- encourages people to relate
- builds self confidence within the group
- allows the leader to participate in all activities thus blurring traditional teacher/learner roles

4 Providing opportunities for interactive language
- encourages dialogue/discussion to arise from a task
- recognises that learning takes place through listening, questioning
- stimulates higher order thinking through negotiating and sharing ideas and information

5 Using the Plan/Act/Reflect cycle of learning
- involves a number of people – professionals and parents – planning together
- focuses on joint action
- reflects upon the action and experience as a base for planning future action
- recognises that by reflecting upon the experience, real learning takes place
- enables participants to move on, to see progress, to maintain motivation.

6 Interagency cooperation
- develops a common style among professionals working in different services, in a way which recognises the other five principles and encourages cooperation
- gives children coherence in the way adults relate to them
- ensures continuity of approach as a child progresses from home, to playgroup, to school

LEARNING FROM OTHERS' EXPERIENCE

This first section shows the experience of others working within contexts of early childhood education and what the Partnership in Education project has learnt and adapted from their experience. The first selection is from internationally known research. The second became part of the project experience because of specific links between the High/Scope Foundation, Strathclyde Regional Council and the project leader. The third is an example of research into a specific situation which has wide-ranging significance for project work.

Evaluation of Head Start programmes, USA – the background

Of the many studies looking at children's development, Skeels' study of children in orphanages during the 1930s showed that those children who were cared for, loved and given stimulus – such as in play or outings – and who developed an attachment to one adult, who was particularly interested in the child and the child's achievement, when compared with children in the orphanage who had received traditional care and no special treatment, had gained 27.5 IQ points. Those children who had traditional care had lost an average of 26.2 IQ points. Skeels followed up the subjects of this research 20 years later and found evidence of continuing intellectual advantage.[3]

3 Berger, E.H. (1981). *Parents as Partners in Education.* New York: The C.V. Mosby Company.

Research findings on social and physical stimulation and development led eventually to the initiation of programmes of early intervention, designed to show the impact of an enriched environment on the intellectual development of young children. The national mood in the USA during the 1960s supported Equal Rights and better opportunity for deprived children. Intervention was seen as a way of helping young children from an economically disadvantaged background to profit from later formal schooling. Since the home environment and neighbourhood were recognised as important in affecting cognitive and social development, some of the programmes were designed to include parents. It was thought that these programmes would have a two-pronged approach. The child would benefit from an enriched early education programme and the parents would be included as an integral part of the programme, as aides, advisory council members or para-professional members of a team. In 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, the first Head Start centres opened.

Head Start programmes

Numerous Head Start programmes, funded by the Federal Government and developed at local level, sprang up all over the USA. Concern for improvements in social awareness, physical development, emotional well-being and improved health influence the objectives set for the comprehensive Head Start programmes. Each programme was developed independently of the others, so the research data and controls for each project varied. One of the first evaluation studies, done by Ohio State University, revealed no sustained intellectual development. This report was highly criticised by early childhood educators as being too narrowly focused, concentrating on purely cognitive gains. However, the findings diminished President Nixon's support for the programme and were also largely responsible for the widespread belief, later shown to be incorrect, that Head Start was a failure. Henry Levin's 1977 statement is typical of the times:

> Good pre-school programmes are able to produce salutary increases in IQ for disadvantaged children but these improvements are not maintained when children enter primary grades.

As years went by, evidence from several evaluators demonstrated that good pre-school programmes have both short-term and long-term effects.

In 1973 Bronfenbrenner[4] examined two types of programmes: centre-based intervention programmes and home-based programmes.

4 Bronfenbrenner, U. (1973). *Is Early Intervention Effective?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Seven out of the 21 Head Start Programmes contained some element of parental involvement. These included: Howard University pre-school programme (Elizabeth Herzog); Ypsilanti Perry pre-school project (David Weikart); Early Training project (Susan W. Gray); Philadelphia project, Temple University (E. Kuno Beller); Indiana project (Walter L. Hodges); Infant Education Research project (Earl Schaefer); Verbal Interaction project (Phyllis Levenstein).

In all these programmes para-professionals worked with parents and children as either a complement to a centre-based programme or on a separate programme.

After examining those which did not have a parental involvement element, Bronfenbrenner came to the conclusion that, although there were considerable initial gains in IQ for participating children, these gains were 'washed out' after the child left the programme. He insisted that this evidence should not be interpreted to mean that the programmes were not beneficial to the child, family and community, because many of the goals of the programmes had a wider focus than the improvement of intelligence quotient scores.

Of the home-based programmes, he said:

> In contrast to group intervention projects, the experimental groups in these home-based programmes not only improve on their initial gains but hold up rather well three to four years after intervention has discontinued.

He concluded that the effects of early intervention were cumulative; and that the younger the child at entrance to the programme (aged one or two years as opposed to three or four years), the greater the gain.

What has the Partnership in Education project taken from Head Start programmes?

Head Start programmes were not specifically based on the concept of partnership as active collaboration between professionals and parents. The programmes were interventionist and, as such, took for granted a 'deficiency' model; that is, they saw the family as deficient in certain areas, for example, not talking with children. This deficiency could be 'put right' by programmes or input from professionals. However, there are still several important findings in the research that the Partnership in Education project has built upon:

- the need for continuity – for example at transition points in life as the child is moving from pre-school to school and so on;
- the need to involve parents in any pre-school programme;
- the value of home visiting as one way of helping to establish good relationships between parents and professionals;
- the importance of verbal interaction between parents and children focused on a cognitively oriented task; that is parents and children talking together over an activity or idea that stimulates negotiation, questioning, explanation, the making of connections;
- an acknowledgement of the importance of the emotional relationship between parents and child in setting a good context for development and giving continuity to learning;
- the need for a high adult-child ratio to enable the above conditions to be created.

Many of these elements have been incorporated into the Partnership project's school-based programmes and in Family Nights and Family Workshops.

High/Scope Foundation – the Perry pre-school programme, USA

One of the Head Start programmes, the Perry pre-school programme, began in 1965. The High/Scope Foundation's Perry pre-school study[5] is a longitudinal study designed to answer the question: can high quality early childhood education help to improve the lives of low-income children and their families and the quality of life of the community as a whole? By 1989 the project had progressed through four of its five phases. Each phase has examined issues that reflect the growth of the children as they move from family to school to the wider world of adulthood.

5 Schweinhart, L.J. and Weikart, D.P. (1980). *Young Children Grow Up – The Effects of the Perry Pre-School Program on Youths Through Age 15.* Ypsilanti: The High/Scope Press.

Phase One focused on the operation of a high-quality programme of early childhood education. Importance was placed on the documentation of the curriculum and on home visits which were part of the programme (1962-67). The principal concern was the early childhood development of intellectual ability.

Phase Two began the longitudinal follow-up study as children and their parents were tracked into elementary school to age eight. The principal measurement concerns of this phase were the intellectual development, school achievement patterns and social maturity of the children. There was also an examination of parental attitudes.

Phase Three extended the longitudinal study of children and families from age eight to 15. The emphases continued to be on intellectual development, and school achievement patterns of children and on family attitudes. During this phase various 'real world' measures grew in importance; these included examinations of scholastic placement, delinquent behaviour, after-school employment and a cost-benefit analysis.

Phase Four followed the group through to age 19. This time, instead of taking an IQ or traditional achievement test, study participants took a test of functional competence that focused on information and skills used in the real world. Other measures focused on social behaviour in the community at large, job training, college attendance, pregnancy rates and patterns of criminal activity.

Phase Five followed subjects through to age 26.

A cost-benefit analysis will provide a final reckoning of the economic value of the pre-school programme with a strong base in actual data. This can be used to estimate projections into the future.

The Perry pre-school study has focused on the lives of 123 youths in five cohorts born each year from 1958 to 1962. The study began in 1962 with the selection of a group of four-year olds and a group of three-year olds. The children came from Ypsilanti, Michigan, a neighbourhood of low-income black families. Children of pre-school age were located for the study by identifying them on a Perry Elementary School census of families with youngsters attending the school, by referrals from neighbourhood groups and by door-to-door canvassing.

Children with IQs between 60 and 90 (Stanford-Binet) with no evidence of handicap were selected for the study. Children were from families with below average incomes for people in the USA. Forty-seven per cent of children lived in single-parent families. Homes were crowded. The available evidence indicated that these early conditions were persistent and were predictive of scholastic failure and other problems.

Evaluation of the Perry pre-school study showed that, having undergone the pre-school programme, the children had greater cognitive ability at school entry than control equivalents. The programme had enhanced children's entry into the

social system of the school, putting them in a better position than they would otherwise be in, a position which appeared highly stable and persistent and which was reinforced by parents and peers. Three main elements of the process were identified:

1 social achievement of the student role;
2 commitment to schooling; and
3 school achievement.

Pre-school education provides extra cognitive stimulation, leading children to demonstrate greater cognitive ability at school entry. This, in time, affects how the children are seen, evaluated and treated as pupils. Higher expectations from teachers, parents and peers are seen to sustain good performance and increase commitment to doing well in school. Eventually school success becomes life success. To the extent that the child has been successful in school the adult is successful in educational attainment, occupational status and income.

The High/Scope curriculum developed during the Perry pre-school study aims to encourage the development of problem solving skills in the children. It explicitly addresses the role of intervention by adults and of careful monitoring of progress in the pre-school unit in helping children to develop such skills and to assume some responsibility for their own learning.

What has the Partnership project taken from the High/Scope study?

The key element in the High/Scope study programme for the project is the emphasis on the development of thinking skills and of giving children some control over their own learning. This involved:

- developing a curriculum that put emphasis on interactive language around a cognitively oriented task;
- encouraging self-confidence, a positive self-image and a sense of personal responsibility for learning;
- placing a strong emphasis on experience-based learning;
- focusing on learning within small groups;
- maintaining a high adult/child ratio which enabled time to talk, listen, act and review;
- emphasising the importance of interactive language and of the plan/act/reflect cycle in helping the development of thinking skills, building confidence and self-esteem;
- recognising the need for continuity throughout children's educational experiences i.e. the move from home/community to schools; and
- recognising the need for support from a variety of adults and peers.

The project's neighbourhood approach aims to enable this continuity and build this supportive learning environment.

In 1984-85 a training programme in the High/Scope methods was carried out in the UK. Twelve representatives from eight agencies (two representing ethnic minorities, workers with a care orientation, education, voluntary and statutory agencies) took part. Those who attended the workshops were nominated by their agency and were expected to return to their centre to train staff in implementing the programme, adapting it to suit their own needs. However, a one-year evaluation carried out in 1986 found that the programme did not meet the needs of all agencies or all of the participants. In particular it did not help them to develop parental involvement programmes within their own situation. The project took from this that professionals were more likely to change their practice through direct experience in their familiar local working context.

The Oxford Pre-School research project, UK

Around the same time as Bronfenbrenner was evaluating the Head Start programmes (early 1970s), Jerome Bruner[6] in Britain was looking at and assessing the extent to which various contexts in pre-school units stimulated complex activity, concentration and conversation among the children and between them and the staff of centres.

6 Bruner, J. (1980). *Under-fives in Britain.* London: Grant McIntyre.

The research was carried out using a systematic observational schedule. There were 120 children observed in the study, with equal numbers in each of three types of pre-school unit (nursery school, nursery class, playgroup). Half of each group was aged three years six months to four years six months and half aged four years six months to five years six months. This enabled comparison to be made between younger and older children.

What the research found

Units in which there was a high 'task' structure were found to encourage greater complexity of action. The link between task structure and complexity of play was also noted by Tizard[7] and in the High/Scope curriculum.

7 Tizard, B. and Hughes, M. (1984). *Young Children Learning.* London: Fontana.

The children were interested in and ready for more intellectually stimulating and demanding tasks than they were meeting in pre-school settings. (This point is echoed by Donaldson[8] and Tizard[9] and by the Perry pre-school programme in the United States).

8 Donaldson, M. (1978). *Children's Minds.* London: Fontana.

9 Tizard, B., Mortimore, J. and Burchell, B. (1981). *Involving Parents in Nursery and Infant Schools.* London: Grant McIntyre.

Children in pairs are more likely to engage in higher level play than children playing alone or in larger groups. A child/adult pair produced the highest level play activity in the child.

Tasks with a clear goal and a structured means for reaching it were associated with the most complex play activity.

However sustained, adult/child interactions were seldom observed in the nursery setting. Conversations between one adult and one child tended to be of the 'one-off' variety, for example, giving instructions or short conversations geared to specific cognitive tasks. However, one to one adult/child interactions were seldom observed in these pre-school settings.

The way a teacher talks to a child is crucial in encouraging or inhibiting the child's response:

> If adult/child interchanges are to assist children's cognitive development they must be more than 'brief encounters' of adult-controlled language with a minimum of child response.

Unstructured open plan settings were detrimental to learning.

On the basis of this research Bruner suggested that:

(i) there should be greater opportunity for adult/child one-to-one interaction in training courses for pre-school workers;
(ii) there should be a recognition of the value of relevant real-life experiences to the child's language and general intellectual development;
(iii) parents at home can provide appropriate real experience and language situations;
(iv) an important determinant of the nature and extent of parental involvement in a pre-school unit was the philosophy of the staff in the unit (which may not always be explicit).

What has the project taken from the Oxford study?

The key elements taken by the project from Bruner's research are:

- the need to value children's experience;
- the need for experience-based learning;
- the importance of small group work;
- the use of interactive language to help children develop concepts and understanding;
- the value of a variety of effective learning situations.

The project uses the idea of valuing children's experience to help acknowledge when children are ready for more intellectually stimulating and demanding tasks. Another key concept in the project's approach is the use of experience-based learning which is relevant to real world situations and the problems children will face.

Through small group work, the project encourages discussion and exchange of ideas, encouraging the building of relationships. In observing children Bruner stressed the need for small group work and the value of one-to-one relationships in the learning situation.

Underlying all the project's work is the development of language skills. Recognising the power of language is a way to develop thinking, critical consciousness to analyse and develop concepts and to shape actions. Bruner saw interactive language as crucial in helping children develop concepts and understanding. By this he meant the 'natural' to-and-fro conversation between child and adult as it occurred naturally and out of a child's curiosity and need to understand. All too often within pre-five centres he observed the language of instruction or command, where there was little opportunity for children to enter into dialogue.

A variety of effective learning situations is possible by encouraging parents and professionals to plan structured settings which are relevant to the child's experience and at the same time allow the child a high degree of autonomy.

KEY IDEAS FROM THEORY AND RESEARCH

The Partnership in Education project has derived support for its practical work from a wide range of theory and research but some authors have had a particular influence. Three of these are dealt with in this section. They have been chosen because they show how a range of material can be used in devising strategies.

The first is the internationally known writer Paulo Freire, who has worked in Latin America. The second is Margaret Donaldson, who works in Scotland and whose studies on how children learn are representative of many which have been stimulated by the seminal work in developmental psychology of Jean Piaget. The third is Barbara Tizard, who has conducted studies which are directly relevant to the relationships between home and school and community that is at the core of the project. She has examined the home as a learning environment.

The common element which has appealed to the project team is that they all treat the learner as a complete individual whose learning can be understood only by examining his/her social context.

Paulo Freire

Freire,[10] a Brazilian born in 1921, was brought up a Catholic, from a middle-class background. He has been strongly influenced by Emmanuel Mourier and by the theology of liberation. Other major influences on Freire's thought have been Hegel, Marx, Sartre, Fromm, Guerara and Mao. Freire has an ability, without envy, to see when another person has developed a concept or offered a valuable insight and to weave these elements into a congruent whole. There are three key books which describe Freire's philosophy and approach – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[11] *Cultural Action for Freedom*[12] and *Education: The Practice of Freedom*.[13]

Freire has utilised valuable insights from the various theorists he draws upon, seeing their relevance to his own theories of learning and his interest in human liberation.

He describes three states of consciousness we all experience – individually and collectively:

a) magical consciousness
b) naive consciousness
c) critical consciousness

With magical consciousness, people feel inferior to facts and events, which are experienced as having been commanded by a superior force or supernatural power, such as fate, destiny or God.

Naive consciousness tends to simplify problems, seeing history as the deeds of great men or women. Tomorrow is expected to be on the same pattern as today and yesterday. There is no awareness of life or history as a process of becoming.

Freire argues that to achieve critical consciousness requires an active experience-based approach to learning and teaching; an approach which is socially and politically responsible and is crucially concerned with the learners as subjects.

Naive consciousness can advance to the level of critical consciousness or it can be deflected back to the level of fanaticism. In fanaticised consciousness, people become dominated by a powerful myth (for example, that the Jews are the cause of the world's problems) and act on the basis of emotion rather than reason. Believing themselves to be free, believing that they are making their own

10 Kirkwood, G. and Kirkwood, C. (1989). *Living Adult Education*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

11 Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

12 Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

13 Freire, P. (1976). *Education: The Practice of Freedom*. London: Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative.

choices, they are in reality following prescriptions. They cease to reflect upon their situation and become directed objects, a condition described by Freire as 'massification'. Freire comments:

> The step from naive transitivity to critical transitivity does not occur automatically. It requires an active dialogical educational programme, concerned with social and political responsibility and prepared to avoid the dangers of massification.

Words and themes

Through language we can explore, describe and try to control our worlds, our lives. Everyone has the right to self-expression and to participate in open equal dialogue with others. But to use language to control one's life requires work – in order to understand, to learn from experience, to reflect with others. Learning about the world and about ourselves is a never ending process. Through language people can shape and state their desires and needs, what they want their world to be like and how they want to relate to one another – they can create and state their 'themes', as Freire calls them.

Education

Education can be either for domestication or for liberation; that is 'banking' education where ideas and information are put into people's heads rather like depositing money in the bank, or problem-posing education which is challenging and developmental and does not restrict an individual's thinking processes or impose a defined viewpoint. Education processes can be mixed, but they cannot be neutral. Freire opts for an education based on conceiving people as subjects who can know and act upon the world in a dialogue with each other. His educational means is to stimulate the development of critical thinking and his objective is to contribute to the process whereby the oppressed and marginalised can make their entry onto the stage of history – moving from spectator to actor.

The quality of people's participation depends on their consciousness. He is not issuing a summons to mindless activism.

Literacy work

With the starting point that people are subjects not objects, and the further assumption that they are interested in the situations in which they find themselves, Freire first of all dispenses with primers and rote learning as a way of teaching adults to read. He describes traditional primers as representing the nutritionist approach to education, in which empty vessels are fed with knowledge. Instead, Freire and his collaborators visit the area in which they intend to work, having first read about it in whatever secondary source material is available. They hold a public meeting, explain their intentions, ask for approval, and call for local volunteers to assist them. The team and their local co-investigators carry out a programme of observation and visits in the area, focusing on every important aspect of life: work, family religion, social life, popular organisations, language. They report their findings to each other, gradually working towards a deepening understanding of the life of the area, its key situations, its contradictions, and its complex themes.

Freire believes that material needs should be satisfied before people can begin to learn and become a 'subject' and 'free'. Gross inequalities in power and wealth are recognised as making it impossible for the majority to have enough materially and to have a say – to use their 'words'.

Finally, Freire is realistic about the limited role of the educator in relation to these objectives. He emphasises the need to avoid euphoric hope followed by cynical despair.

> Liberating education in general and the single classroom in particular cannot transform society by themselves. This limit needs to be repeated so that none of us mistake what dialogical learning means. Critical curiosity, some political awareness, democratic participation, habits of intellectual scrutiny and interest in social change are realistic goals, from inside a dialogic course.

What has the project taken from Paulo Freire?

The writings of Paulo Freire have had a major impact on the Partnership in Education project's philosophy. The influence of Freire's thinking is reflected in all the principles.

Valuing others
The project stresses the importance of seeing people as subjects who act upon the world and not as passive objects – which is dehumanising.

Experience-based learning
Freire in his adult education programmes dispenses with rote learning, primers and so on, and starts from people's experience in the here-and-now as a means of teaching literacy and numeracy skills and in challenging the 'accepted' world view. He took the words people wanted to use to teach reading and writing skills. Critical thinking developed through exploring meanings of words within a social context.

Working in small groups
People need time, space and relationships in order to explore and challenge their own thinking. People need to value and to be valued. The small group situation enables this and leads to exchange, interactive language, growth.

The Plan/Act/Reflect cycle
This comes directly from Freire's philosophy. Without a structure, without constant reflection on the action, there is always the danger of mindless activism or a loss of purpose and development. For critical consciousness to develop, individuals and groups need to be constantly aware of their thought processes and the influences on their thinking.

Interagency cooperation
In Freire's philosophy the teacher is the learner, the learner the teacher. In other words, professionals should not assume they have the answers. They are 'co-investigators', they have something to offer but only as a contribution to the greater good. Each individual has a valid contribution and each individual's contribution counts. Collaboration, cooperation, sharing perspectives and 'themes' are ways in which individuals can develop and shape their own thinking and, by doing this, the individual has a richer contribution to make to the good of the whole.

Freire sees the development of individuals and groups as interdependent. For the project the need for professionals and 'agencies' to share experience and perspective is seen in the same way. A partnership way of working means that one group does not condemn or feel superior to another, but acknowledges that each has something to contribute, a prerequisite for cooperation and collaboration.

Margaret Donaldson

Margaret Donaldson of Edinburgh University challenged many of Piaget's propositions about how children learn and how children express that learning. She says:

> It now looks as though a child first makes sense of situations (and perhaps especially those involving human intention) and then uses this kind of understanding to help him/her to make sense of what is said.[14]

14 Donaldson, M. (1978). *Children's Minds*. London: Fontana

Throughout her book, ***Children's Minds***, Margaret Donaldson analyses Piaget's tests and findings on children's thinking skills and contrasts this evidence with recent research which has shown children's responses to be dependent on their interpretation of human intention – of what they think is expected of them and of how they interpret the language used. She takes each of Piaget's findings about the development of thinking and language and shows that their interest is based on false premises about the way children operate in real-life situations. In the experimental situations in which children were placed during Piaget's experiments there were no familiar contexts to use. Children were unsure about the intentions of the tester and unfamiliar with the context and apparatus used in the experiments. As a consequence the children did not demonstrate their possession of certain intellectual abilities.

The goal of formal education, Margaret Donaldson argues, would appear to be 'to produce people who are capable of ignoring their own individual knowledge and experience and who can instead think in a logical disembedded manner freed from the constraints of their own particular viewpoint.' In order to achieve this, children need to learn, right from the start of school, that they are indeed in a new environment where they will have to acquire new skills and new ways of talking.

Young children do not think as effectively as adults and cannot solve problems older children find easy. However, mistakes young children make in reasoning may not be due to any essential 'illogicality'; rather, the children's apparent failures in thinking are due to failures of memory or to misunderstanding about what the adult wants them to do, especially in the social context of an experiment. Children are seen at their most competent, not when attempting tasks set by psychologists, but when they attempt tasks they have set themselves in an environment which is supportive to them.

What has the project taken from Margaret Donaldson?

The key elements of Donaldson's work which are most relevant to the Partnership in Education project are the recognition of the need for experience-based learning which is 'embedded' and concrete, in the context of real experience. This is an essential first step towards more abstract thinking skills. 'Experience' is seen in terms of everyday 'real' life brought into the formal education system.

Using the Plan/Act/Reflect cycle of learning and teaching is a means towards encouraging the development of 'disembedded' thought, as the reflection process creates the need to 'stand back' from experience and analyse it.

Margaret Donaldson also stresses the importance of a supportive learning environment for the young thinker. Again, this echoes other research on the value of, and need for, greater parent/professional and inter-professional cooperation.

The Neighbourhood Approach adopted by the project has, as its central way of working, the development of parent/professional and interprofessional

relationships and support to create the best learning environment for young children.

The project also recognises the parallels between Freire's concept of critical consciousness and Margaret Donaldson's concept of 'disembedded' thought. In terms of the project, this ability to 'stand back', to be self-critical, to be able to generalise from the particular, is built in to the project's way of working. Within the project there are times for activity and reflection on the activity, times for sharing experiences and looking at ways to move work forwards. In working with all parent and professional groups, this process is built-in – planning an activity together, sharing the action, reflecting on what has happened and looking together at how to develop ideas and relationships further.

Barbara Tizard

Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughes' study of 30 four-year-old girls at home and at school is reported in their book *Young Children Learning*.[15]

15 Tizard, B. and Hughes, M. (1984). *Young Children Learning*. London: Fontana.

The study raises some fundamental questions about how young children think and learn and the role which adults can play in helping them. Microphones were attached to children at home and in the nursery school to record comments. The sample included children from working class homes and middle class homes.

The home provides a very powerful learning environment – especially for matters concerned with the social world – play, games, stories and even formal 'lessons' provide an educational context in the course of which a good deal of general knowledge, as well as literacy and numeracy skills, are transmitted. But the most frequent learning context is that of everyday living. Home learning is often embedded in contexts of great meaning to the child: making a shopping list, deciding how many cakes for tea, playing card games. Relevance and interest make it easy for the child to learn.

All the basic language usages were observed in all the homes; the social class difference was in the frequency of the usages, not in their occurrence. Children are by no means passive absorbers of language or of knowledge. Their own intellectual efforts are an essential part of the learning process. In all homes many questions went unanswered, misunderstandings were often unchecked by mothers, many explanations given were misleading. In spite of all this, Tizard claims that much valuable language interaction and useful learning takes place at home. Persistent intellectual curiosity is a particularly prominent feature of four-year-olds. This is because of the flexible and incomplete structure of their conceptual framework and also because of children's growing awareness of the many confusions and misunderstandings they meet.

These observations lead Barbara Tizard to question some of Piaget's theories. She accepts Piaget's notion of the child as an active learner, but she believes he underestimated the role of verbal exploration in mental development and problem solving. She also argues that he underestimated the importance of the child's interest in the social world of adults, and the role which adults can play in helping the child towards understanding through dialogue. 'Our study suggests that the kind of dialogue that seems to help the child is not that currently favoured by many teachers, in which the adult poses a series of questions. It is rather one in which the adult listens to the child's questions and comments, helps to clarify her [or his] ideas and feeds her [or him] the information she [or he] asks for.' The nursery school as an environment is very different from the home. To be socialised into the world of school, to learn a new code of behaviour, children have to adapt to school routine. To make themselves understood to strangers, they have to learn to understand the intentions and communication requirements of the school staff.

The most striking difference between homes and schools as settings for learning is the way that school focuses on play. Children learn social skills in pre-school settings such as playing with each other, sharing and taking turns. By experimenting with sand, water, bricks and paints they acquire an understanding of the physical world which many regard necessary for mathematical and scientific knowledge. For anyone following a Piagetian model, this would be an ideal curriculum. The disadvantage however, of providing an environment entirely geared to play is that the possibility of children learning by watching and taking part in the adult world is thereby excluded. The role of staff becomes that of watching over and talking to children rather than themselves engaging in adult activities which might serve as interesting and challenging models to children. Conversations between staff and child are contrived – they take a question/answer format.

Tizard observed that conversations focused on the here-and-now of the pre-school setting and were not embedded in the experience of outside reality. It was the mother in the home who linked the child's present to his or her past and future, and to the world beyond his or her own immediate experiences. Because the staff know little of the child's life outside school, they cannot integrate his or her experiences in the way that it is possible for a parent to do.

Because of high child/adult ratio at home, mothers speak to their children nearly three times as often as teachers talk to pupils, and what they say contributes far more to their child's development than the questions teachers tend to ask.

Barbara Tizard poses the question: What can professionals learn from parents? She answers:

> Our study suggests that school and home make very different demands on children and that children behave differently in the two settings. Our study suggests that judgements on children's language abilities should be very tentative until a context is found where they talk freely and spontaneously. We suspect that the same caution should be exercised when pronouncing on other aspects of children's behaviour such as their play.

If the home environment is so favourable to learning, should children attend nursery schools or playgroups at all? Children have a variety of educational needs, some of which cannot be met within the home. They need to learn how to get on with other children, to be a member of a group, to separate from their families, to relate to and communicate with a range of other adults, to use a variety of play equipment. The strong emotional environment of home fosters some kinds of learning, but may not provide opportunities for other kinds.

The school's problem is seen to be the need to find ways of fostering, harnessing and satisfying the interest and curiosity which children show at home. An environment is required which will allow the 'puzzling mind' to flourish, and which will help young children overcome their considerable ignorance and misinformation, develop their intellectual capacities and improve their communication skills.

Tizard accepts Margaret Donaldson's theories on the need to see the child's abilities in familiar contexts, rather than the, often artificial, environments of experimental situations or nursery and school settings. She would also agree that school must necessarily be different from home because it is a setting in which the child's home learning has to be 'decontextualised'. At home, for example, children may learn to count in relation to rock cakes or card games. This knowledge is not necessarily available to them in other contexts. It is the school's role to introduce children to a way of thinking and knowing the world which is independent of their own experiences – children who are capable of thinking in a logical and 'disembedded' manner, able to see situations from the

viewpoint of others' viewpoints. While she would not want to argue with the view that 'disembedded' thinking or academic skills are important goals of education, her objection is to the notion that these goals are best served in ignorance of the skills and interests that children manifestly possess at home. Her observations of children at home showed them displaying a range of interests and linguistic skills which enabled them to be powerful learners. Yet observations of the same children at nursery school showed that no account was being taken of these interests and skills in the tasks and conversations they met in pre-school centres.

There is no doubt that, in the world of school, the child appears to be a much less active thinker than she is at home. It has to be questioned whether the schools can possibly be meeting their goals in the most efficient manner if they are unable to make use of so many of the children's skills. 'If children are unable to bring these skills and interests into school, then a split will inevitably arise between what they are learning in the two locations.'

'It is time to shift the emphasis away from what parents should learn from professionals and towards what professionals can learn from parents and children at home.'

Barbara Tizard argues for smaller adult/child ratios and for greater parental involvement in school settings, for a greater sharing of the two worlds, for information of all kinds on the curriculum, and general organisation of the school being made accessible to parents.

What has the project taken from Barbara Tizard?

The key elements taken from the Tizard/Hughes research are:

- an acknowledgement of the great impact of home as a rich context of learning;
- recognition that because of the familiar and shared context between parents and child, the emotional relationships and continuity, there are rich opportunities for talking, negotiating and questioning;
- understanding of the need for parents and professionals to work more closely together to enable the best from both worlds to contribute to children's growth and learning;
- acknowledgement of a desired change in emphasis in the way nurseries are run, from constant activity to opportunities for conversation;
- recognition of the need for better information for parents if they are to become partners with professional educators, including a change in emphasis from 'this is how you do it' to acknowledging that any situation is rich in learning opportunities;
- awareness of the value of helping children to develop communication skills which in turn would help build bridges between home and school.

Barbara Tizard's recommendation that a great deal more could be done during teacher training courses to encourage a broader, more community-based approach to teaching is a view also held within the Partnership in Education project. Many of the project's documents and workshops have been used in pre-service training programmes, and collaboration with colleges is seen as a high priority in the dissemination of a partnership approach to education.

TOWARDS PARTNERSHIP

Recent research into early childhood education shows the need to value young children and interact with them in 'real' ways – person to person, in the context of meaningful activities. Learning takes place all the time and most effectively when it has purpose and is rooted in everyday experience. The Partnership in Education project acknowledges the need for skilled practitioners – but not so that they can operate in isolation from the community and the wider social context of children's lives.

The awareness of parents as the prime educators of their children has led to a recognition that if children are to begin to achieve their potential as learners then parents and professional workers need to form a partnership, each contributing different but complementary skills and experience. This is true in other areas of service provision – in health, social work and community organisations. Often many professionals assume that ensuring children's learning is their domain while many parents will often be convinced that they ought to leave it to the professionals. Blatchford[16] describes the situation of many parents:

> Parents tend to undervalue their own influence and potential as vital factors in their children's learning, except over matters where they see themselves as competent.

And:

> Parents did not appear to appreciate that many of the everyday activities they did with their children such as reading stories and looking at books were of significance towards learning to read.

There is a need to create formal structures to enable parent/professional partnerships in aiding children's learning; for example, in a school situation where there is a need to give information to parents about what the school is teaching, why it is teaching different things and how it is doing so.

Strathclyde Regional Council's Mission Statement includes in its objectives 'promoting education as an active partnership between users and providers in which the views of clients and staff are highly valued'.[17]

The Partnership in Education project seeks to encourage professionals to develop skills in working with parents so as to maximise and complement their own work in aiding children's cognitive and social learning. The project has developed programmes for joint working between parents and professionals and developed an approach which builds confidence in parents and encourages professionals to see parents' central role in their children's learning.

16 Blatchford, P., as quoted in Clarke, M. (1988). *Children Under Five: Educational Research and Evidence*. London: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers.

17 Strathclyde Regional Council. (1991). *Quality in Education – Documents for Consultation*. Glasgow: Strathclyde Regional Council.

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Studies and Evaluation Papers is a series of background documents drawn from field experience to present relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

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The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** is an international, philanthropic and professional institution based in The Netherlands. Created in 1949 for broad humanitarian purposes, the Foundation concentrates its resources on support for the development of community-led and culturally appropriate initiatives that focus on the developmental needs of children from birth to eight years of age. Currently, the Foundation supports some 100 major projects in more than 40 developing and industrialised countries.

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